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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problem of the oversupply of teachers and presents some guidelines for developing a differentiated and flexible teacher education program as a means of producing a marketable teacher. A differentiated and flexible teacher education program would take into account local, state, and regional teacher needs, which would necessitate the establishment of regional communications networks between the teacher training institutions and local school districts. A guided program of educational experiences with all types of children on all grade levels and with student interaction with inservice teachers, administrators, and members of the community would serve as a basis for area specialization or withdrawal from the program and would give the student a perspective on the reality of children, teachers, and schools. If the student elects to continue, the last two years of his or her undergraduate program may be spent at a consortium institution of specialization. Area consortia composed of institutions that specialize in one or two areas would provide a differentiated pattern of teacher education that would allow consortium members to concentrate on excellence. Finally, this program would necessitate redefining the role of teacher trainer, changing it from one of a supplier of student teachers to one of an active participant in staff development. (PD)

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THE TEACHER MARKET GLUT: SOME GUIDELINES

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An informal survey of some twelve Southern and Northeastern school districts indicates the known fact that the supply of teachers has far exceeded the demand and that the majority of applicants are members of the graduating class of 1972.

The result of this oversupply is that school districts enjoy the "pick of the litter" for openings; employed teachers are holding their present positions, even though desiring to move; and the unemployed graduates with crisp certificate and degree in hand are seeking employment in other fields.

The question that remains to be answered is why college Departments of Education continue to graduate teachers trained for positions that do not exist? What is the rationale for producing physical education teachers with expectations of coaching a high school varsity team? Will the elementary education major trained to teach a group of middle class youngsters in a self-contained situation be employed?

Projections of the N.E.A. Research Division indicate that the increase in the number of qualified teachers to be graduated during the present decade greatly overshadows the number of positions to be added or maintained in the elementary and secondary schools.

They forecast that

> The number of qualified teacher education graduates ready to enter teaching will exceed the number of openings for them each year between 1971 and 1979. Each year after 1972, the size of the surplus is expected to be larger than the total number of positions to be filled; showing that, as a whole, there will be at least two qualified graduates available for each teaching position open to beginning teachers. [1]

The study concludes that

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[1] "Teacher Job Shortage Ahead," NEA Research Bulletin, October 1971, p. 72.

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> The interests of students considering teaching as a career are likely to be served best by colleges and universities which encourage only the best qualified potential teachers to complete preparation for the teaching profession; otherwise, increasing numbers of graduates prepared to teach will find their college experience not relevant to the employment opportunities open to them following graduation.[2]

The message to teacher trainers is to place emphasis on quality rather than quantity. Perhaps this signals the implementation of competency based teacher education programs that weed out the students who cannot meet established performance criteria. Although many of these programs have merit and represent a major breakthrough in providing an alternative to the traditional methods and materials class brand of teacher education, their implementation may prove to be a great consumer of time and money; two commodities that are not readily available, especially to the smaller institution.

However, inherent in the feedback to the teacher training institutions from the job market is that change is needed. For some teacher trainers, this mandate may fall on deaf ears. Others may react by defending their present programs with "we've trained teachers this way for years, why change?" In recognition of the situation they may pass a resolution to raise the grade point criteria for admission to student teaching by two or three tenths of a point. Some may simply appoint a committee.

The change needed in teacher education cannot be accomplished through limiting admissions to the experiential portion of a training program to those with superior academic standing as this may eliminate many potentially excellent teachers who exhibit the humanistic characteristics and interest in children that are not necessarily correlated with academic excellance. Neither can it be accomplished by appointing a committee "to further study the issues."

[2] Ibid., p. 73.

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What seems to be needed is differentiation and flexibility in teacher preparation programs along with the provision of a broad spectrum of experiences for the student with the goal towards his self-selection into or out of teacher education.

A differentiated and flexible teacher education program would take into account local, state and regional teacher needs over a projected four year period. Over the long run, this would necessitate the establishment of regional communications networks between the teacher training institutions and local school districts. However, for immediate needs, such information could easily be gathered by the institution from districts in its area. Once areas of need have been established, programs may be revamped to fill these needs.

It is foolhearty to assume that any but a multi-university could meet the varied needs for school personnel. Thus, the need for area consortiums composed of institutions with the ability to concentrate on one or two areas of preparation. For example, an area consortium composed of five institutions faced with a market for speech, trainable, industrial arts, secondary economics and sociology, and remedial reading teachers may elect to assign preparation areas to member institutions with specific staff strengths in one of these areas. The education offerings of the institution would be limited to that particular field of training, with students being given the option of attending any of the consortium member schools for different specialization areas.

With such an arrangement, a differentiated pattern of teacher education would allow consortium members to concentrate on excellence in a single area, so that a marketable teacher could be produced.

The ramifications of the teacher training consortium are that the areas of

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preparation offered by any one training program would be reduced and institutional duplication of training functions would be eliminated. Thus, only one of the number of consortium member colleges in a particular area might produce elementary school teachers, greatly stemming the supply for a dwindling demand. Flexibility seems to be a necessity in this type of arrangement, as consortium institutions may periodically realign their training area emphasis to meet shifting market demands.

Along with concerns about the financial foundation and logistics of a teacher training consortium, a prime source of resistance to revamping preparation programs to meet market needs may be the teacher trainers.

Feelings of anxiety and inadequacy about concentrating on the training of teachers in areas other than elementary and secondary education will, no doubt, cause a hostile reaction to the consortium notion. These fears may be alleviated to some degree by assessing the competencies and strengths of teacher training personnel and a realignment of staff between consortium institutions so that expertise in a specific area may be centralized at a particular institution.

The specialized staff of each consortium member school should be complimented by a number of generalists to supply the students with the experiences, general competencies, and guidance needed to assist him with the self-selection process.

It seems to be essential that prospective teachers participate in a wide range of experiences in schools and with children well in advance of the student teaching semester. At the present time, students enrolled in some teacher training programs may not have contact with children or a school until student teaching. Perhaps the prime importance of providing the education student with

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experience is to enable him to decide whether teaching should be his profession.

A guided program of educational experiences with all types of children on all grade levels, where the student may interact with the in-service teacher, administrators, and members of the community, may serve as a basis for area specialization or withdrawal from the program. In an experiential based approach, a portion of the first two years of the student's undergraduate program would be spent in a tutorial relationship with a member of the teacher training staff. Aside from arranging basic experiences for the student, the staff member would be in a position to prescribe experiences in the areas of specilization of the consortium. The role of the teacher trainer would become one of a guide rather than a methodologist as he would provide not only on-site assistance to the student in the field, but an atmosphere where feedback, personal growth and decision-making would be experienced by the student.

Knowing what areas of specialization are open to him before entry into the teacher training program, having taken part in a range of educational experiences and received the benefits of a close tutorial relationship, the student may elect to continue or withdraw from the education curriculum. Rather than having to wait until late in his undergraduate career to find out what teaching is all about, he has a perspective on the reality of children, teachers and schools in general and some concrete expectations about his area of specilization.

If the student elects to continue, the last two years of his undergraduate program may be spent at his choice of consortium institution of specilization.

Inherent in such a program is a role redefinition for teacher trainers and the addition of flexibility to meet individual student, job market and consor-

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tium needs. Thus, the teacher trainer must abandon his lecturn, his images of the ideal and his cookbook approach of methodologies and become a guide to the learner, exposing him to the reality of experience, helping him to find ways to deal with this reality, and assisting him to find his place in it.

The establishment of area teacher education consortiums with a field-experiential approach to teacher education implies greater degrees of communication and cooperation between school districts and teacher education institutions. This, in turn, may act as an impetus to an expansion of the function of teacher education into the area of in-service training. Thus, the flexibility of the teacher training staff may be channelled to meet the current and projected needs of the local school and district.

Through the collaborative articulation of needs and services, the teacher training institution may change its role from a supplier of student teachers to an active participant in staff development; from an infrequent contractor for a stock methods course to a personnel training arm of the local school district.

The current status of educational employment has proclaimed a mandate for change: a mandate that calls for teacher education to justify its existence. The notion of the differentiated teacher training consortium combined with an experiential approach and an extension of the function of teacher education may be a viable alternative for providing well trained teachers to meet specific educational needs in an atmosphere of continual self-renewal.